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ABSTRACT

This document is comprised of the papers presented at the First Ladies' Symposium on Early Childhood in Egypt in May 2001. Participating in the symposium were representatives from the World Bank, the Amsterdam Institute for International Development, the Children's Project, and the Academy for Educational Development. The symposium opened with an address from Suzanne Mubarak, the first lady of Egypt, asserting that education is the best investment for the future of Egypt and discussing a plan to increase the percentage of children in preschool from 13 to 60 percent over 5 years. Elaine R. Wolfensohn of the World Bank applauded Egypt's progress in numerous educational reforms and in its focus on investing in early childhood development to expand its comprehensive framework for education and training. Jacques van der Gaag's (Amsterdam Institute for International Development) presentation, "From Child Development to Human Development," described the costs and benefits of investing in early childhood development. A presentation by Joan Lombard, of the Children's Project, discussed the importance of the child's environment for the process of brain development. Chloe O'Gara's (Academy for Educational Development) presentation summarizing work appraising policies and programs for young children in Egypt concluded the symposium proceedings.(KB)

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First Ladies' Symposium on Early Childhood in Egypt

Academy for Educational Development
Ready to Learn Center
May 21, 2001

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Address by Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, Arab Republic of Egypt

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to begin by welcoming Ms. Elaine Wolfensohn, World Bank representatives, and symposium participants. I would also like to express Egypt's appreciation for the continuous and effective role played by the World Bank in supporting the development and advancement of Egypt's education system.

Egypt has made great progress toward improved child protection, development, and care. In the last decade, Egypt made great strides in providing health, social, and cultural care for its children. In this decade, we wish to pay more attention to early childhood and children with special needs, including talented children. We want to provide children with a safe and healthy environment. We also want to ensure that the educational system enhances children's talents and provides them with opportunities to distinguish themselves.

In Egypt, we are working through an institutional framework based on advanced scientific concepts and an integrated scientific approach capable of tackling real problems. With the establishment of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) as well as the focused efforts of related entities concerned with child care, we have developed a clear and holistic strategy for child development and care in Egypt.

Today we are meeting to discuss one of the most important human development issues in Egypt. We strongly believe that education is the best investment for our nation. Indeed, education *is* our national project to build Egypt's future. Child care has become a great concern, and one to which we devote much attention, time, and effort. We believe that children in Egypt have the right to appropriate opportunities to create the best possible life for themselves. This is not limited only to health or social care or the provision of infrastructure, but it includes child care, attention, protection, safety, and self-confidence as well. We consider early childhood development and care programs an additional aim in the effort to improve child care and education in Egypt.

Despite the fact that early childhood development programs yield their fruits over a period of time, we must still give them our attention, as they create the essential foundation on which all future educational efforts rest. Regardless of whether the definition of early childhood is from ages zero to three or, as in other countries, ages two to four, it is nevertheless a crucial stage in the shaping of a child's character, skills, and attitudes. What takes place during this important early stage of a child's life has a profound effect on what he or she achieves throughout late childhood and into adolescence. And these effects extend to later life as well. Thus, it is important that in the early years of their lives, we should develop the basic skills children will need to ensure a stable personality, social integration, and empowerment through the development of language, art appreciaion, motor development, handicrafts, and social and emotional maturity. If opportunities are not provided for children to develop these abilities and acquire these experiences, they may suffer an irretrievable loss. Indeed, the problem usually faced by children at different stages of their education is what we call "late development."

Ladies and gentlemen, we ought to begin any talk of early childhood development with a discussion of the role played by families. The family is the child's first school, the father and mother the first teachers. It is a scientific fact that more than 50 percent of a child's mental growth occurs between birth and age 4, before the child has enrolled in preschool. Thus, fathers and mothers possess the key to developing the basic skills their children will need in school, to building their personalities and strengthening their ability to communicate with others. A Mother in particular plays an important role in developing her children's talents. She does this by providing stimulation, positive reinforcement, love, and nurturing.

Our efforts should not be limited to social and educational institutions. Rather, we should expand them into an integrated effort that addresses first the family, raising fathers' and mothers' awareness of the importance of early childhood and sensitizing them to their children's needs. The aim should be to establish the clear belief that caring for their children is the best investment parents can make, and that the fruits of this investment last forever as they are passed down through the generations.

In view of this aim and the fact that this is the beginning of a new decade for our national cultural project—the "Reading for all Festival"—we have decided to add a new feature to the festival. The "Read for your Child Campaign" will disseminate to Egyptian families early education methodologies. It will emphasize families' and society's roles in preparing children for their educational journeys as well as introduce them to the world of books in the early months of their lives. I assure you that reading to children, even in their early months, has a great impact on their developing the ability to read later on. This is a truth recalled by the proverb that says "It is difficult for an adult to read who was never read to as a child."

Experiments have shown that children as young as 18 months can recognize and repeat words and shapes by ongoing reading and repetition. Moreover, the child who is enrolled in nursery and preschool and who has acquired an amount of language experiences and reading knowledge will begin school with an increased ability to acquire language, perform duties, and learn from experiences.

Ladies and gentlemen, investing in early childhood and developing children's mental capabilities should not be at the expense of the enjoyment of childhood. Learning must be harmonized with children's right to enjoyment; it must take advantage of their natural need to love, nurture, appreciate, belong, inquire, play, and succeed. Thus, learning methods applied during preschool must radically differ from those of later educational stages. Nursery and preschool are important stages of children's life, for they lay down the foundation for a lifetime of educational experience. Nursery and preschool should be splendid and enjoyable experiences, developing the desire to learn, fulfilling the zeal to gain knowledge, and creating a real love of going to school.

We look forward in Egypt to being able to provide a place for each child in preschool and to achieve our greatest objective, which is that preschool becomes a part of the

compulsory education system. We hope to undertake a phased plan of action that will increase the percentage of children in preschool from 13 to 60 percent over five years. There are perhaps a few people who think that providing integrated programs for so many children is an easy task. However, these plans require arduous and tremendous efforts. Among the many challenges are creating parental awareness regarding the importance of early childhood development; providing social care, health services, and child nutrition requirements; preparing school infrastructure in accordance with certain specifications and providing schools with the necessary equipment to ensure access to exercise activities. Other challenges are teacher training, qualified manpower, curriculum development, and innovative training methodologies that foster child intelligence via instructional material, music, sports, as well as stimulation and nurturing.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a great responsibility, and it will be a real challenge to mobilize for this effort. We are in need of real collaboration and cooperation between families and educational institutions. We need not only the efforts of social and health-care and non-governmental organizations, but of all stakeholders to ensure that every Egyptian child obtains what he or she deserves. Despite our ambitious goals, we will be able by God's will to achieve them, thanks in great part to the pillars we have built through the effective partnership and continuous support offered to us by the World Bank.

Lastly, I hope that this important international symposium will begin a new phase in integrated care for early childhood, one where scientific discussion helps create the basis of a framework for an integrated program to which all concerned organizations contribute. Let us launch a new era in our human development, ensuring the best investment of our capabilities and energies in supporting Egypt's renaissance.

Address by Mrs. Elaine R. Wolfensohn, The World Bank

Good morning, Madame Mubarak, your excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen. First, let me thank you, Madame Mubarak, for the invitation to participate in this important conference. It is an honor to be here and a special pleasure to participate in a conference that focuses on early childhood education.

From an international perspective, Egypt has been exemplary in its national commitment to education. We have observed how education became a national priority under the leadership of you and President Mubarak. Your vision of a holistic approach to education and training has resulted in concurrent investments in all levels of education. This has led to a comprehensive strategic framework for the whole pyramid of basic education, secondary education, higher education, and skills training through both the public and private sectors. The World Bank is pleased to have been one of the partners supporting the comprehensive strategy beginning with the enhancement of basic education.

While challenges remain, progress made in increasing access to basic education, particularly for girls in the most disadvantage governorates, has enabled further enhancement in secondary level and the reform of higher education and skills training for greater competitiveness in the global economy.

I am pleased to know that Egypt is now ready to take another important step to expand its comprehensive framework for education and training: one that will begin to strengthen its human capital from the foundation. This is its focus on and investing in early childhood development.

There are today in Egypt over 8.5 million children of five years of age and below, or about 13 percent of the total population. These children deserve the best in terms of adequate care, nutrition, and preparation for school. They deserve the best because they *are* the future of Egypt.

We all know how important it is to nurture children during the early years. Research in early childhood education and advances in neuroscience have shown that most of the brain's neural pathways are formed before the age of three. By age six, when most children enter school, their basic mental capacity, coping skills, personality, and ability to perform in life are already set. Early years, therefore, provide a "window of opportunity" to intervene with the right essentials.

At the same time, there is also evidence that the brains of infants who are not adequately nurtured, fed, and cared for during the early years do not develop fully. In fact, early deprivation can lead to costly problems later on in life, including learning difficulties, poor performance in school, and behavioral and emotional problems.

We need to be especially concerned for those children and families who are poor. They run a greater risk of not receiving the essentials. The families in rural, disadvantaged areas are the ones who would benefit the most from these early childhood programs.

Worldwide, while we have seen important advances in our understanding of the important role of early development, we have been less successful in conveying these messages to parents, teachers, and administrators. I suspect this is an issue for Egypt as well, where a serious obstacle to reaching the poor is the lack of knowledge among the poor about the importance of early child development. An important area of intervention to consider, therefore, would be to provide systematic attention to parents and the home environment.

On the basis of knowledge we have, most governments now agree on the importance of early intervention. Yet, programs for children in many countries receive only a fraction of the necessary public finance. What is usually not taken into consideration is that the *costs of inaction* over time would far outweigh the investments made now. I am very pleased that the Egyptian government is again leading the way in focusing on this important issue. Through gatherings such as these with expert advice, appropriate policies and programs for children can be designed. As a result, Egypt is welcoming a future of greater equality, of highly skilled workforce, and greater prosperity for all.

Thank you.

Presentation by Jacques van der Gaag, Amsterdam Institute for International Development

From Child Development to Human Development

> **Benefits of Investing in Early Childhood Development**
> - Immediate benefits for children ages 0–5
> - Intermediate benefits for school age children
> - Long-term benefits for those children as adults
> - Societal benefits, economic growth, human development

The well-being of a society is tied to investing in early childhood development (ECD) programs. There are immediate benefits of investing in early childhood development (ages 0–5), intermediate benefits during the school age years, and important long-term benefits. These are the basis for consequent societal benefits and economic growth and human development of the nation.

The literature on economic growth shows that countries that have invested their resources wisely, that have high savings in terms of physical capital, free trade policies, price stability, flexible markets, and low government expenditure have favorable economic growth. But now what is also showing up is that high social capital, i.e., higher levels of education and better household status, is also important. Therefore, *when we link ECD investments to improved education, health, and social capital, we are talking about economic growth and human development.*

- **Benefits of ECD on Education**

  ECD—cognitive development, nutrition, health, social development—means earlier, better, and more schooling for young children. Improved schooling opportunities lead to higher income, better personal and family health, more social cohesion, and reduced poverty, fertility, and crime.

- **Benefits of ECD on Health**

  ECD improves infants' and children's health, lowering morbidity and mortality rates, decreasing malnutrition, improving hygiene, and increasing safety. Specifically, the incidence and severity of diabetes, bronchitis, asthma, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, and cardiovascular diseases/problems are reduced through ECD. Ultimately, improved health leads to higher income and productivity.

- **Benefits of ECD on Social Capital**

  ECD reduces aggressiveness, increases interaction, and results in more socially adjusted individuals. These traits lead to increased social competence, improved social relationships, better understanding of the community's norms and values, and reduced likelihood of delinquency. Enhanced social capital also results in higher incomes and productivity.

Measuring Economic Benefits of ECD Programs

How do we assess the both the immediate and long-term economic benefits of ECD interventions? We use economic models in two ways. First we portion out and assess the effects at a point in time. Second, we conduct longitudinal studies, following a cohort of children throughout their lifetime. The life outcomes for members of an "intervention" cohort who received ECD services are compared with the life outcomes for those who did not benefit from such programs.

Benefits Measured from the High/Scope Perry Pre-School Program

- Child care
- Education
- Employment-related compensation
- Adult secondary education
- Public welfare assistance
- Delinquency and crime

Benefit-Cost Evidence from Longitudinal Studies

One sees among the ECD intervention cohorts all the benefits listed earlier, i.e., better progress through school, higher incomes, better social skills, etc. By definition longitudinal studies take a lifetime but they have actually been done. The best known study of this type is the High/Scope Perry Pre-School Program, which began about 30 years ago. It compares life experiences of children who benefited from the High Scope Perry Pre-School program in the USA with life experiences of similar children who were not in the High Scope program. The benefits of the High Scope program have actually been measured against groups of people who did not receive such ECD services.

The results of ECD are significant, measured in this longitudinal study. The positive effects of ECD began with the immediate child care benefits, then benefits related to the educational system. The group that did not benefit from the EC intervention had a larger need for remedial education (which is an inefficient way of compensating for inadequate ECD). Moreover, delinquency and crime rates were lower among ECD beneficiaries, as was the need for public welfare assistance.

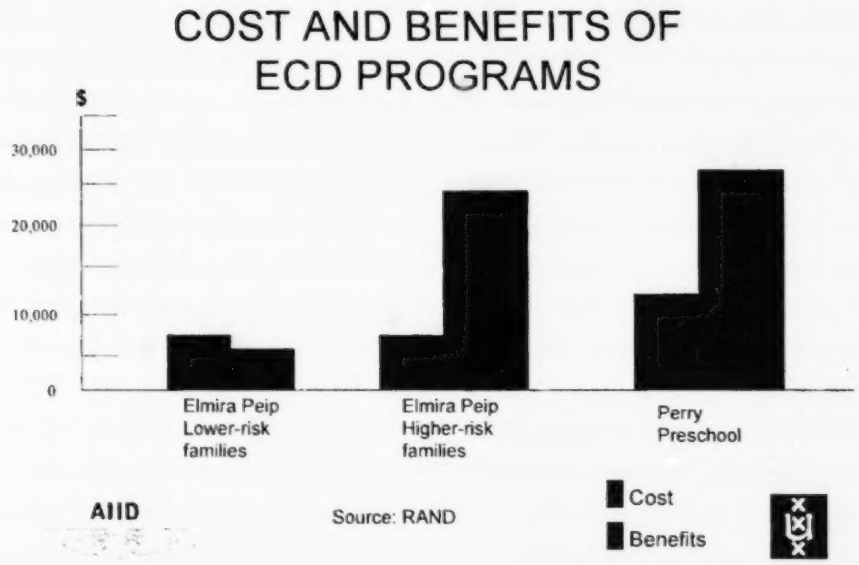


Figure 1 illustrates costs and benefits of two ECD programs. The black bars show the cost and the gray bars the benefits, which in each instance are multiples of the cost. Figure 1 also illustrates that investing in children from high-risk families yields the greatest benefits relative to cost. The middle bars are the results of a study similar to High/Scope (Elmira-Pelp), where the benefits were measured at two to three times the cost of the program. On the left-hand side are the results of the same program on lower-risk families, showing lower benefits than the cost. The figure strikingly shows the importance, from the economic point of view, of targeting ECD interventions to higher-risk populations.

Cross-Sectional Comparisons of Cost-Benefits of ECD

What if we need information now, or are not patient enough to wait a lifetime for a study? In these cases, we have some very basic economic tools available.

Imagine a girl-child, age 12, who goes to work either at her father's shop or land. She has a certain productivity level that increases with age, stabilizes by the time she is 50, and goes down when she stops working at age 55. Imagine the same child again if she has six years of primary education. In Figure 2, the red area is the cost of that human capital investment. Now when the child goes to work her productivity is higher than it would have been without the investment (area B) and it stays higher through out her lifetime.

[Insert Figure 2]

We can assess the economic value of the higher productivity by comparing its value to the cost of the investment in the education that made it possible. This yields a simple

measure of the economic returns to the investment. The cost-benefit ratio of ECD programs are determined in the same way, by comparing the costs of investments in the child starting from birth, to the returns on these investment as the child's full potential and productivity are realized. Internationally, we have assessed cost-benefit ratios for some ECD projects. The results are represented in the table below. *A benefit-cost ratio of 3 means that for every one dollar invested, the return is three dollars.*

[Insert Table 1]

We can compare the ECD benefit-cost ratios with those of selected World Bank projects. For example, the benefit-cost ratio for the Hill Forest Development Project is 1.18, meaning that for every dollar invested the return was 1.18. Given this comparison, were I given a choice, I would choose to invest in an ECD over a cement factory, because the returns on ECD investments are higher.

[Insert Table 2]

Equality

Egalitarian societies can expect higher sustainable growth than inegalitarian societies. ECD fosters a more equal society when it is invested in the children of higher-risk populations. We should thus focus our attention on leveling the playing field before the game of life begins. Education, after all, has always been called the great equalizer and, in that framework, ECD is the greatest equalizer of all.

[Insert Figure 3 (Graph)**]**

Human Development and the Education Gap in Egypt

Causes of Economic Growth

- *Economic*: savings, physical capital, natural resources, trade policy, price stability, flexible markets, and low government expenditure.
- *Social*: Education, health, social capital and equality.

The human development indicators have significantly improved in Egypt over the past decades. But there is still a disparity between the lower and upper income groups, a disparity that exists in years of education and adult literacy rates as well. The evidence is that there are high-risk groups in Egypt that need special attention. First there is the need to focus on education. Second, there is the need to focus on the large group of children growing up in high-risk environments who, because they are not ready to learn, don't learn.

Conclusion

The direct, short-term effects of ECD are well recognized. However, it is important to increase understanding and knowledge about its long-term effects on individuals, families, and communities.

It is certain that there is a link between ECD and human development goals. I think it is absolutely right at this stage to focus on ECD in Egypt. Investment in ECD programs should be an integrated into the overall human development strategy of the nation. The country's human development framework depends not only on economic factors, but on social factors like education, health, social capital, and equality as well.

The results of investing in ECD programs last a lifetime. These programs should be of good quality and be targeted to children of high-risk groups. The programs should be evaluated periodically to ensure quality and that they adapt to new knowledge and lessons learned from other ongoing programs.

Presentation by Joan Lombardi, The Children's Project

The Science of ECD

> Early development is shaped by a dynamic and continuous interaction between biology and experience.

Over the past decade, important new research in neurobiology and behavioral and social sciences has led to a greater understanding of early childhood development. From the prenatal period through age 5, children rapidly develop capabilities on which subsequent development builds. Development occurs in a relatively orderly sequence, with later abilities, skills, and knowledge building on those already acquired. Yet development is very individualized and may occur at different rates for different children. Contemporary researchers believe that this highly complex process is influenced by the interplay of nature and nurture. The course of development can be altered in early childhood by effective interventions that change the balance between risk and protection, thereby shifting the odds in favor of more adaptive outcomes.

New knowledge about the significance of healthy and nurturing environments and early brain development – knowledge enriched by brain imaging technologies - reinforces our awareness of the importance of interactions in the early years of a child's life.

The Science of ECD Today

Much of our new thinking about ECD comes from a combination of health, behavioral, and neurosciences. Today we can actually look at a developing brain and see how it operates. We find that a one-year-old brain resembles that of an adult; in other word, the first year is a period of rapid brain development. Brain development is like the development of a giant communication system. Babies have some important wiring, neurons, that are not fully connected when they are born.

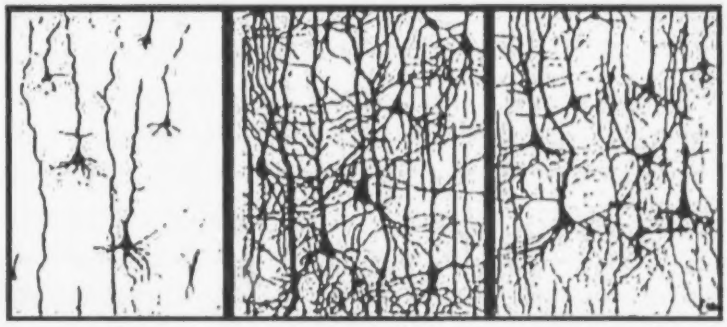
The development of the brain is a continuous process that begins early in the prenatal period and continues through adolescence and beyond. However, the nervous system undergoes its most rapid development during the first few years of life. At birth the infant brain has roughly 100 billion neurons or nerve cells; yet it is still in an "unfinished state" since most of the neurons are not connected in networks.

A brain cell consists of an axon connected to a dendrite. These connections, or synapses, are formed based on the experiences we have.

Neurotransmitters transmit electrical signals through the synapses and that is how the brain operates. In the first decade of life, a child's brain forms trillions of connections or synapses. These connections among neurons are formed as the growing child experiences the surrounding world. While the number of neurons remains stable, the number of synapses increases markedly in the first three years. But the important thing to remember is that experiences make these connections. *It is through early childhood and everyday experiences that most of these connections are made.* Through intense relationships and

experiences in early childhood, the brain develops rapidly. There is a dramatic increase in the synaptic density from birth to 6 years of age which is pictured below.

The child's environment has an impact on the process of brain development. Each experience excites certain neural circuits and leaves others inactive. Those that are consistently "turned on" over time are strengthened, while others may drop away. While this process may continue over many years, early childhood is considered a critical period in brain development. The rapid increase in the density of synapses during early childhood is followed by a sort of pruning process during middle childhood that leaves the "communication" system of the brain more organized. By the fourteenth year, neural density decreases as the brain becomes more specialized, shaped by experience.



Synaptic Density in the Human Brain

Although our understanding is incomplete, it is increasing rapidly, and our thinking has changed.

- Brain development is what occurs after we are born and is related to the experiences we have. Brain development is not determined mainly by genes or biology.
- We now know that we need to start early.
- We used to think that what happened between the ages of 3 and 5 had little impact. Now we know that this is the period of most rapid brain development.
- We also know that the period between prenatal and age 5 sets the stage for future sturdy—or fragile—development.

The Role of Family

Over the years, we have realized that we need to start early to improve early childhood development, i.e., from the prenatal stage. We must take a comprehensive approach, beginning with health screening, treatment, and follow up. The approach should provide family support and parental education, educational stimulation, and special attention to the special needs of children.

Healthy and Nurturing Environments

Children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development are closely related. Early childhood proceeds most successfully when the health and nutritional needs of children are met. Healthy development is threatened by poor nutrition, specific infections, environmental toxins, drug exposure, and chronic stress stemming from abuse or neglect through the early years and beyond. The growth charts of children who had poor nutrition and medical care show improvement when parents provide them with an improved environment and better care. It is important for a baby to receive good prenatal healthcare (which is part of a complete package of ECD services) and to form a secure attachment to her/his parent.

The relationships that children have with their parents and other regular caregivers have a strong influence on their overall well-being. Children grow and thrive in the context of strong, stable, and consistent relationships that provide love and nurture, security, responsive interaction, and encouragement of exploration. The early development of children depends on the health, well-being, and economic security of their families.

A healthy baby is born curious, ready to learn and make the neuronal connections that shape her brain. For example, babies from the start can differentiate and recognize their mothers' voices. Attachment is a protective biological function that helps the child to cope with stress. These relationships are the context that provides the nurturing environment that a child needs. Children must have active interaction with their parents and not just be passively reared in front of the television. Babies' curiosity should be encouraged.

We know that family plays an important role in a child's development. Family members should be made active participants as adult learners, volunteers, and decision-makers. In fact, we need to involve the whole community. We want to have a balance between standards and local flexibility. It is critical to have good leadership and provide ongoing support for training and technical assistance. It is also important to have good coordination and a good system for evaluation and feedback.

ECD Policies and Programs

Every report tells us that our policies have not kept up with our science. I think we are going to see a change here in Egypt and a change that will be reflected across the world.

Studies of early interventions indicate that we can positively affect early development, particularly for young, vulnerable, at-risk children. Such interventions often combine a number of related strategies, including among others: prenatal and early health promotion, parent education and family support, early education, early attention to special needs, and community and economic development. While there are still gaps in our knowledge of what types of interventions work best under which conditions, an accumulating number of studies have emerged that confirm the short and long-term benefits of investing in ECD.

Presentation by Chloe O'Gara, Academy for Educational Development

Early Childhood Education in Egypt

Why Early childhood education in Egypt?

- Effectiveness, efficiency, and equity
- Poverty gap in education
- Universal basic education
- School readiness
- Literacy
- Women's work

This presentation summarizes work over the last several months appraising policies and programs for young children in Egypt, with a focus on education. In Egypt access to basic education is almost universal, with enrollments at well over 90 percent. There is now a need to pay special attention to the 10 percent who are not enrolled. These children are likely to come from households where there is no experience of schooling or where the parents are illiterate. These children need special help and extra support to start well in school, and that's where early childhood education comes in.

Early childhood education is one of the most critical interventions to ensure that all children can succeed in school and fulfill their potential as citizens. Early childhood education investments are efficient, because compensating for lack of development in later years is both difficult and expensive. Early childhood education is becoming important in Egypt as more women join the work force and families need additional help and support with child care in the first five years.

Early Childhood Education is a Timely Investment for Egypt

The foundations of learning, and the greatest effects of learning on brain structure, are made in the first five years of a child's life. Many countries would like to invest in early childhood education, but they are not at the point of development where that would be feasible. Egypt, on other hand, has made very strategic investments in the last couple of decades that have brought down infant and child mortality rates to 29 and 44 per thousand respectively. Basic education coverage is well over 90 percent, and the goal of universal primary education creates an urgent need for early childhood education to ensure that children from illiterate and isolated households can succeed in school and the education system can operate efficiently and effectively.

Home and Family-Focused Programs

Families provide every young child's first learning environment. In Egypt, there are a number of community and home-based programs that have active support from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Unicef. *Alam Simsim*, an educational TV program for young children supported by USAID and others, reaches 60 percent of households. As is true for such programs in other countries, coverage is limited and expansion, to impoverished and difficult-to-reach households would reach the children who could benefit most from this programming. A strengthened relationship between the

program and the formal education system could further improve its effectiveness and efficiency.

There is little current information on Egyptian parents' child-rearing practices or their awareness of ECD principles and services. More information and analysis of child-rearing knowledge, beliefs and practices would be invaluable to assess the need for parent support and education and to design and implement such programs.

Nurseries

There is an extensive nursery system providing child care for young children ages 0 to 4 years in Egypt. About two-thirds of nursery services are provided by NGOs, with the balance covered by an active private sector. The Ministry of Social Affairs sponsors a limited number of services, catalyzes many NGO services with funding, and provides regulatory oversight for all nursery services.

The average cost to a family for nursery care is approximately 120–240 LE. In addition to nursery care.there appear to be abundant informal, unregulated child care services available to parents.

Since 1995, the number of nurseries rose to 7,525 from 5,000 and the number of children covered rose to 600,000 from 500,000. This is almost 10 percent of the nation's 0 to 4-year-olds. In addition, substantial numbers of children remain in nurseries through their fifth and sixth years. The nature and quality of the pre-school / KG education that these children receive is unknown.

Nurseries
- Services from birth to 4 years
- De facto services to six years
- Coverage: 7,525 nurseries (5000 in 1995); 600,000 children (500,000 in 1995)

Nursery Standards

The National Council on Children and Mothers, which has multisectoral oversight of ECD programs states:

> Nurseries should have special specifications. They should have a space for free movement, green areas, musical instruments, play tools and equipment, drawing and painting stuff, places for rest and tranquility, special designs for water closets, tables, chairs and corners with cushions for the teacher, with children sitting around her, listening to stories and oral information" NCCM 1999: 14

Taken as a whole, nurseries form a large system. There are 45,000 employees of which 5,516 are at the director level, more than 18,000 are supervisors, 3,290 are secretaries and only 13,513 are nannies. We have identified no training programs with extensive coverage, and no standard curricula. The World Bank team assessing ECD services visited several nurseries, which were, with one exception, bare. They did not match the

implicit standards in the NCCM specifications quoted above. Child minders were caring for the children, but most had no curriculum, child development training, or plan for educating the children. Therefore, there is a lot of scope for improvement. But there is a range of quality and some very excellent models in Egypt to build on.

KG (Pre-Primary Education)

Pre-primary education is under the oversight of the Ministry of Education. The remarkable growth in quantity and quality of KG in recent years has been concentrated in and led by the public sector.

- Every new government school has a KG1 and a KG2 for 4 and 5 year olds respectively.
- Existing schools are given support to upgrade classrooms or other spaces to KGs.
- Specialized teacher education is producing a cohort of good KG teachers.

Today there are approximately 354,435 KG students in the public and private sectors. There has been a strong increase in national KG gross enrollment rates just since 1997. The enrollment rose from less than 12 percent of the age cohort in 1997 to more than 13 percent in 1999. The latest data show an enrollment of almost 14 percent, a remarkably steep curve.

KG Today
- 354,435 KG students
- Growth of quantity and quality led by the public sector
- KG 1 and KG 2
- 4 and 5 year olds

As important as increased coverage, however, is improved quality. There has been a decade of quality improvements in Egypt's KG. The number of trained teachers has increased: compared to the 1,128 trained teachers in 1991/92, there are 8,809 trained teachers today. Class sizes, which averaged 40 children in 1990, have come down to 30 today. The public KGs also have an assistant (apart from the teacher) attached to each class. The World Bank team observed a lot of active learning during its classroom visits.

It is of interest to compare Egypt's private sector KG enrollments and services to private sector provision in other countries. The data show that Egypt, as compared to the other Arab states and the least developed countries, is closer to developed countries in its profile, with about 51 percent of its KG services offered by the private sector.

[Insert graph here: Provision of Pre-Primary Education by the Private Sector
Egypt 51%; Arab States 78%; Least dev'd 83%; Developed 25%]

When considering the pre-primary enrollments of the girl-child, Egypt is on par with the industrialized nations for gender balance, a good sign for future gender equity at higher levels of primary and secondary.

Costs of KG

The strong demand for KG services has led schools to regulate the intake of students by increasing fees. One unfortunate consequence is that the neediest students—and those

who most benefit from KG—are being excluded. Based on Ministry of Education data, the World Bank team has estimated the annual cost to the government for each KG student to be approximately 409 LE. The annual costs to families after the new regulations are instituted for each grade level of the system will be 19.3 LE. However, the reality now is that families are paying 200–300 LE per year for KG services for their children, with a range from 100 LE in poor areas to 800 LE for experimental KG (especially the English-language KGs that are most valued by upwardly mobile parents).

The current charges for KG compare unfavorably to family costs for primary and preparatory levels. Low-income families today spend approximately 125.04 LE on primary and preparatory schooling. This amount includes books, stationary, transportation, and private lessons – none of which are included in the kindergarten fees cited above. Middle-income groups spend about 181 LE, and upper income families spend 622 LE, and the higher expenditures are probably largely a reflection of tutoring.

Conclusion

The outstanding early childhood development and education issues in Egypt are:

Quality of services

- *Curriculum,* particularly for nurseries
- *Facilities* to meet the ambitious ministry targets; this will require a great deal of investment in construction and rehabilitation
- *Human resources* to accelerate and expand training without compromising quality

Equity of access

- *Effectiveness and efficiency,* giving priority to children from disadvantaged and illiterate households, because returns to ECD investments are highest for them
- *Costs,* which are a barrier to access, especially for poor children
- *Parent awareness* of their roles as the first educators

Egypt has made an excellent start in educating its young children. The policy commitment to expansion and continued quality will lead to an exceptional future built on strong human development principles.

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